
ARTICLES

Sister Mary Joseph Croke

Another Voice from the Crimean War, 1854–1856

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Sister Mary Joseph Croke nursed with the Irish Sisters of Mercy during the Crimean War (1854–1856). Analysis of 161 pages of her journal entries from October 1854 to May 1856 reveals that Croke and her sisters worked as a systematic group that provided nursing care day and night. A contract with the war office gave them the necessary confidence in their “professional” rights. This helped them to endure the bias against their race and religion to gain access to men in need of their nursing expertise. They remained a cohesive group throughout their time in the Crimea and confronted the “self-assured self-righteousness of Victorian imperialism.”¹

Sister Mary Joseph Croke (née Isabella Croke) was part of a long tradition of Irish nursing that Lavinia L. Dock traces “almost to pre-historical times.” In the nineteenth century the Sisters of Mercy “early attained brilliant prestige in nursing.” Dock describes the founder, Catherine McAuley (1778–1841), as a “beautiful, benign, and highly cultured woman of great gifts for leadership.”² McAuley turned her back on a decorous Dublin life and used her inheritance (about \$1,400,000 in 1990 currency) to care for the poor. On 24 September 1827, she established the House of Mercy. Four years later on 12 December 1831, this charity was institutionalized as the Sisters of Mercy.³

Sister Mary Joseph Croke was born in Mallow, County Cork, in 1825, the second daughter and fourth of eight children born to William Croke and Isabella Plummer Croke. Croke’s maternal grandparents, Fitzgerald

and Plummer, were Protestant, Anglo-Irish. Her grandfather, Thomas Fitzgerald, was the sixteenth Knight of Glin, of Glin Castle, County Limerick. His daughter, Frances Fitzgerald, and her husband, Brudenell Plummer, disowned their daughter, Isabella Plummer, when she married the Catholic William Croke, an Irishman from Tralee, County Kerry. At William's death seventeen years later, his brother, the priest Thomas S. Croke, rescued the widow and her children and brought them from Casteltor to Charleville, County Cork.⁴ Young Isabella was then nine years old. She and her older sister, Margaret, followed the Protestant faith of their mother, while her brothers were Catholics like their father. Her older brothers lived in the rectory with Father Croke, while she, her sister Margaret, and the youngest boys lived nearby with their mother.

In Isabella's time, the penal laws of 1691 that had made Catholicism, education, and ownership of property by the Irish treasonable offenses had been relaxed. But by the 1800s the Irish were a subject people on their own land.⁵ In 1808, from County Kerry, the county of Isabella's father, came Daniel O'Connell, a lawyer who mobilized the masses and championed their human rights. O'Connell ignored the divisiveness that for centuries had strategically pitted Catholic against Protestant. He raised to their feet people who had been treated as brutes. Most important, O'Connell made the Catholic Irish conscious of their numerical strength and their rights as British citizens. More than likely, the eighteen-year-old Isabella witnessed his oratorical skills at the 18 May 1843 "monster" meeting in Charleville where 300,000 people listened to the "King of the Beggars."⁶

Catherine McAuley had already begun her work of mercy. She and her associates dealt with "the urgent needs of the poor."⁷ The poor were everywhere in Ireland, including Charleville. Thomas S. Croke, Isabella's uncle, persuaded McAuley to come to Charleville. She arrived two days before the Celtic New Year, Samhain, and the Christian holy day of All Saints, 30 October 1836. The poor welcomed "the divine creatures" and marveled as the "walking nuns" visited them in their hovels and huts along the back lanes. Nor were those in the death-filled workhouses shunned by these "blessed angels." The "black ladies" would do in Charleville what they were already doing in Dublin and Tullamore and would do in all the years to come throughout the world. "The holy women from Dublin" would instruct poor girls, protect distressed women of good character, and visit the sick. And whenever McAuley was tempted to abandon the project at its shaky beginnings, she remembered a poor woman's exclamation: "Oh! then it was the Almighty God Himself . . . that dhrove ye in among us."⁸

Famine, 1845–1849

The misery of the poor was compounded when *Phytophthora infestans*, a fungus that attacks potatoes, made its appearance on 12 September 1845. The potato blight did its worst damage in Black '47, destroying the food on which the poor of Ireland subsisted. Famine roamed Ireland unchecked. *Cois dubh*, scurvy, also prevailed (only years later would potatoes be found to be rich in Vitamin C). With starvation came *fiabhras dubh*, typhus, and *fiabhras buidhe*, relapsing fever. Although the louse that carried typhus and relapsing fever had been identified a hundred years before, further study had been abandoned because of a misinterpretation of some observations.⁹ Not until the beginning of the twentieth century was the relationship between the louse and typhus correctly described.

At the same time that people starved, fevered, and died, England exported Ireland's corn and cattle. Parliament paid no heed to those who interceded for the poor and ignored even the pleas that came from Europe and the United States. The government dismissed the begging Irish and their problems. The failure of England to recognize the seriousness of the famine foreshadowed its inept handling of the Crimean War only a few years later.

Before the famine was over the population of Ireland was smaller by two million people. Almost a million had died of famine; another million had fled from the cursed land. Four thousand orphan girls living in work-houses were transported to Australia.¹⁰ Boys and men accepted the Queen's shilling and joined the British army. In 1847 when Isabella's brother, Thomas, returned to Ireland after six years in France, he wrote to a friend in Rome, "This part of the world is a frightful place."¹¹

Isabella was twenty years old when the famine began. In her own town of Charleville, the population dropped from 4,472 in 1845 to 2,862 in 1850.¹² Her twenty-eight-year-old brother, Reverend William Croke, died during the famine, probably picking up "the fever" from his parishioners; her other siblings joined the Irish diaspora. Only Isabella and Thomas would remain in Ireland, though these two also spent time away. Thomas eventually became the Archbishop of Caiséal, but before he did, he spent four years as Bishop of Auckland, New Zealand. Isabella spent sixteen months in the Crimea.

What were Isabella's thoughts during this time? We cannot be sure. Sometime between her father's death and 1847, Isabella converted from Protestantism to Catholicism. She entered the Sisters of Mercy on 15 Au-

gust 1847, was received on 22 February 1848, and made her vows on 10 April 1850.¹³ From this point on she was known as Sister Mary Joseph Croke, though she would remain “Dear Issy” to her brother Thomas for the rest of her life.

In nineteenth-century Ireland the number of nuns increased from 120 in 1800 to 1,500 by 1851. The 11 female religious houses and 6 religious orders of 1800 grew to 368 convents and 35 orders by 1900. While the population decreased by 50 percent, the population of nuns increased by 8 percent. But more important than their numbers was their status; the nuns had power, prestige, and authority. The nuns lived with other women within convents that became female islands of self-determination in a male-dominated and male-defined society. But of all those who took vows—priests, brothers, and nuns—nuns were the least powerful.¹⁴

During her transformation into a Sister of Mercy, Croke probably worked in the industrial school where young girls were taught to crochet the fine lace that American women craved for their fashionable dresses. She may have worked with sisters teaching in the school for girls. Most certainly she visited the sick poor, as did all followers of Catherine McAuley during their first four years as Sisters of Mercy. And it is more than likely that she visited the sick in the crowded fever hospital. Perhaps she was among the sisters who attended her brother, the young Father Croke, on his deathbed, as they mourned “the most sterling and affectionately devoted friend [of] the community.”¹⁵

Crimean War, 1854–1856

Croke was four years professed a Sister of Mercy in October 1854 when William Russell told his story of men dying in the Crimea with no one to tend to them. The war correspondent blazed his story across the pages of the *London Times*. For the first time ever people were able to follow a war almost as it was happening. Day after day the lists of the dead and wounded appeared at breakfast tables. “Why were there no nurses tending their husbands, fathers, brothers, and beaux?” his readers asked. When Russell reported that Sisters of Charity cared for England’s French allies, British citizens demanded to know, “Why have we no Sisters of Charity?” The answer to this question reached back three hundred years to Henry VIII. Nursing sisters had been banished, monasteries sacked, and churches destroyed as Henry separated the church from the state. By the mid-

nineteenth century, Oxford's brilliant scholar John Henry Newman rejected the validity of the Henry-made Anglican Church. The intellectual and religious turmoil that culminated in what is now known as the Oxford Movement affected many, including Florence Nightingale. During this same time England emancipated the Catholics in 1829, but prejudice against them continued as before. England restored the Catholic hierarchy in 1850, but when Catholics began to exercise their new freedoms, Protestants cried out against papal aggression. The 50,000 readers of the *Times*, while not apathetic regarding religion, were more concerned with their dying men. So vehement was their protest that Secretary at War Sidney Herbert was forced to send female nurses to the Crimea. While the public policy was being shaped, the Crimean calamity continued and "carnage crimsoned hill and plain."¹⁶

Bishop Thomas Grant jolted Mother Clara Moore and her sisters, Stanislaus, De Chantal, Anastasia, and Gonzaga, out of their convent in Bermondsey, England. With little preparation they started alone for the Crimea on 17 October 1854. Florence Nightingale and her party left a few days later, and when they joined the Bermondsey contingent in Paris, Nightingale proceeded to the head of the parade. Still the public clamored: More nurses must be sent. England had nowhere to turn but to Ireland and the Catholic Church.

Ireland sent nursing sisters to the Crimea, and they went as living symbols that Catholicism and patriotism were not mutually exclusive. The lessons of human and legal rights taught by Daniel O'Connell, the fresh grief in their hearts for their own famine victims and emigres, and, more important, the centuries of oppression shaped the Irish response. Thoughtful and methodical, the Irish bishops exacted privileges even as they promised services. These were then spelled out in a contract: The nuns were to have their own spiritual leader; they were to have their own chaplain; and they were to serve under Florence Nightingale in all matters related to nursing.

The Irish contingent was led by County Clare native Mother Francis Bridgeman (née Joanna Bridgeman). Bridgeman, the founding superior of the Sisters of Mercy at Kinsale, County Cork, was a wise choice. She was a kinswoman of Daniel O'Connell; she had nursed in 1832 during *bliain na cholera*, the year of the cholera; and she had borne witness to the famine's unchecked death march through Ireland. Her convent in Kinsale fed the poor twice a day, nursed in the fever hospital, and when cholera struck again in 1849, cared for its victims both day and night.¹⁷ The forty-one-

year-old Bridgeman had been with the Sisters of Mercy for sixteen years and was experienced in nursing as well as in leading women.

Croke was twenty-nine years old when she left her hometown and convent to serve under Bridgeman. As she left Charleville behind, Croke may have thought of her own losses—of her father, her brother, and in this same year, 1854, her mother. Perhaps she thought of how her uncle had rescued the family. Would they otherwise have been statistics of the famine? This Celtic and Anglo-Irish woman, a Protestant turned Catholic, stepped out of her convent onto a world stage. She brought with her the twenty-seven-year legacy of nursing done by the Sisters of Mercy, and her own nursing experience and skill in living with other women devoted to a common purpose. “The event caused a great stir in the quiet little town. . . . The Sisters ‘going to war’ were accompanied to the train by a crowd of all sizes and shapes.”¹⁸

When Croke left Charleville with Sister Clare Lalor, she was part of a tradition centuries old. Irish missionaries had brought the light of knowledge to Europe during the long Dark Ages. Two of Croke’s brothers studied in Europe: her favorite became a missionary to New Zealand and the other was a missionary to the United States. Her older sister, Margaret, became a missionary to Australia. But it is likely this was Croke’s first time outside of Ireland. “After a hurried preparing of our kit and a draw on the purveying department,” she wrote, “we went train speed to Dublin” (p. 1). At Baggot Street, Croke met her “military sisters”: Sisters Paula Rice and Aloysia Hurley from Cork; Sisters Aloysius Doyle and Stanislaus Heyfron from Carlow; Sisters Joseph Lynch and Clare Keane from Kinsale; Sisters Agnes Whitty and Elizabeth Hersey from Dublin; and their leader, Mother Francis Bridgeman. Sisters Elizabeth Butler, Winifred Sprey, and Magdalen Alcock of Liverpool and Sister Bernard Dixon of Chelsea joined the group when it arrived in England.

When Mother Vincent Whitty, the superior at Baggot Street, responded to the call for nurses, she wrote,

We know it must be difficult, if not impossible, to procure for [our countrymen engaged as soldiers in the East] the skilful nurses speaking their own language and sympathizing with their habits and feelings, and that care and attention in a strange land which would be so well supplied at home. Attendance on the sick, as you are aware, is part of the work of our Institute, and sad experience amongst the poor has convinced us that even with the advantages of medical aid, many valuable lives are lost for want of careful nursing.¹⁹

TABLE 1. Irish Sisters of Mercy Who Nursed During the Crimean War, 1854–1856.

<i>Scutari</i> (8 Jan. 1855– 29 Jan. 1855)	<i>Scutari</i> (29 Jan. 1855– 8 Oct. 1855)	<i>Koulali</i> (29 Jan. 1855– 8 Oct. 1855)	<i>Balaklava</i> (8 Oct. 1855– 11 Apr. 1856)
Francis Bridgeman	Elizabeth Hersey	Magdalen Alcock	Magdalen Alcock
Aloysius Doyle	Clare Keane	Francis Bridgeman	Francis Bridgeman
Elizabeth Hersey	Paula Rice	Elizabeth Butler	Elizabeth Butler
Winifred Sprey	Winifred Sprey	Joseph Croke	Joseph Croke
Agnes Whitty	Agnes Whitty	Bernard Dixon	Aloysius Doyle
		Aloysius Doyle	Elizabeth Hersey
		Stanislaus Heyfron	Stanislaus Heyfron
		Aloysia Hurley	Aloysia Hurley
		Clare Lalor	Clare Keane
		Joseph Lynch	Joseph Lynch
			Paula Rice
			Winifred Sprey
			Agnes Whitty

Croke and her sisters volunteered for the mission and banded together under the leadership of Mother Bridgeman. Each was accustomed to following a leader. It was part of their “holy Rule” to have “forever renounced” their own will and to “obey God Himself, [and] when [they] obey for His Love, those whom He has placed over [them].”²⁰ In addition, the Sisters of Mercy operated on the principle that “the act of one is the act of all,” and each sister also received a copy of the seven rules they must follow.²¹

William Ronan of the Society of Jesus also volunteered for the mission. When Monsignor William Yore, vicar general, approached Gardiner Street in Dublin for a chaplain, Ronan “offered himself without hesitation.”²² Originally from Northern Ireland, Ronan was born 13 July 1825, the day after the anniversary of the 1690 Battle of the Boyne, during which England conquered Ireland. Like Bridgeman, Croke, and others, Ronan knew the human costs of imperialism. In Constantinople he served as chaplain to the nuns and Catholic soldiers there and as liaison between Bridgeman and the military authorities. Overseeing the entire contingent was the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland. Unlike the precipitous launching of Sister Clare Moore and the Bermondsey contingent, that of the Irish Mercy nuns was carefully planned and executed. What is more, Bridgeman had

been entrusted with the nuns by the superiors of their convents under the provision that they were *not* to be put under Moore's authority.²³

Itinerary

On 7 December 1854, the group left London and "after a rough passage arrived at Boulogne" (p. 2). From there they took the train to Paris. Croke writes, "[We were] entertained in good style at the Hotel, [but] had to dine with the seculars. Did, however, admirably well notwithstanding that, and, the extreme quickness of the French waiters" (p. 2). If they were not celebrities, the nuns were at least curiosities as the "nurses going to war" traveled across France. At the old town of Lyons, sacred to Lugh, the Celtic Apollo, "a great crowd [was] waiting to stare at us. *Did* stare," reported Croke (p. 2).

During the sojourn between London and Galata, Croke soaked up the scenery.

Traveled all day—day delightful—scenery enchanting, the whole country looking like pleasure grounds laid out by the hands of a more than terrestrial gardener. Green hills rising above each other gave a delightful effect to the richly cultivated valleys—here lay whole acres devoted to the culture of the vine. There rose the lofty cypress the mulberry and the olive, the palm tree and the cedar and even the rose tree bearing its ever blooming flower. (P. 2)

As she and her sisters made their diagonal way across France, they saw the ancient and history-laden towns of Dijon, Lyons, and Vienne. "Scenery all the way delightful," enthused Croke, and she added, "saw the snow clad Alps in the distance" (p. 3). At stops along the way Croke and her sisters worshipped in churches and cathedrals. At Avignon they caught the attention of "the good priest during Mass." Croke writes, "[He] desired the clerk to procure us chairs," and added parenthetically, "French politeness" (p. 3). When they finally arrived in Marseilles, one of the nuns thought they were in Constantinople. But only the overland portion of their journey was over; the worst of the trip still lay ahead. They boarded an unseaworthy mail boat, the *Egyptus*, and almost at once the journey became a life-threatening undertaking. The first night on board the *Egyptus* was "dreadful": "All on board sick not excepting the Captain. In a dreadful panic in my rocking berth. Thought my last hour was come. Made most fervent acts of Contrition" (p. 3).

This was the first but not the last time during the days on the high seas that Croke feared for her life. But the next day was calm as they sailed through the Bonifacio Strait between Corsica and Sardinia and then through the Messina Strait between Italy and Sicily. At Sicily most of the party went ashore, but the nuns stayed on board. Croke filled a page of her journal with descriptions:

Delightful day such a one as may be seen in our dear "emerald isle." The scene as viewed from the ship perfectly enchanting—too much so to be pictured by description or even imagination supposing the painter to be a poet as well. The town appeared large, it contains two convents in the center of which rises a beautiful Church. It also contains a monastery of the Dominican Order [and] the garden. . . . The English ladies plucked some orange-boughs bearing their golden fruit which they afterwards presented to us. Boats pass and repass from our ship to the shore. The Sicilians row over boatfuls of oranges figs . . . quantities [of] which were purchased and liberally distributed among us. (P. 4)

Their brief respite at an end, they left the security of firm ground and sailed without incident until the next day:

Dreadful storm . . . arose about 11 o'clock [lock] p.m. Rain, thunder, lighting. Part of the vessel carried off. Twenty-four waves passed over the ship. Water half a yard deep in our cabin. Four men heaving it out. The deck overflowing. Thought we were going to the bottom. Thought it a great pity! Threw a miraculous medal into the sea. Storm in no way abated. [We were] preserved, however. It is thought a great miracle. (P. 5)

On 12 December 1854, the twenty-third anniversary of the founding of the Institute of Mercy, fifteen Sisters of Mercy were almost swallowed by the angry sea. After they put into the Bay of Navarino for shelter, Croke recounted, "scarcely able to walk from the fatigue of casting up [vomiting]. . . . Eat nothing that day. Could not. Went to hammock early. Slept well. Storm all night. Did not mind. Safely anchored" (p. 5).

At Athens the nuns again remained on ship as their fellow passengers went ashore. Athenians came on board the ship in very pretty costumes "something like the Highland." An Irish woman, a Sister of Charity, presented them with oranges and flowers. When the ladies returned to the ship they gave Croke "a little bit of the old Athenian wall, a juniper blossom [and] a daisy." The Mediterranean sun was very different from that of Croke's own northern island; she reported the sun "so burning as to require a shade." But the sun dried all the sea-soaked clothes. At dinner they ate

sardines from the Athenian bay. Croke summed up the Athenian stopover as “another delightful petting day from our Heavenly Father” (p. 6).

The sun remained their constant companion the rest of the way. They sailed through the Greek archipelago, passed by the plains of Troy, entered the Dardanelles, and anchored at Gallipoli. On 17 December, they arrived safely at the shores of the Turkish capital and anchored there for the night.²⁴ The next morning, instead of offering a welcome, Florence Nightingale refused to receive them. They were told that they were “not wanted” in Scutari and that their coming had been “a gross misunderstanding on the part of the War Office.” There was neither work for them to do nor accomodation.²⁵ Croke rhymed:

But note as from a “Nightingale,”
In strains unknown to us before,
Our coming plaintiveley bewailed,
And warbled “Do not come ashore.”²⁶

Using Duncan Menzies, the Principal Medical Officer (PMO), “under whose orders I am,” to buttress her authority, Nightingale justified her claim that Scutari had as large a number of nurses as they could use “consistent with morality.” Nightingale wrote in a letter to Secretary at War Sidney Herbert, “the discipline of forty women, collected together for the first time, is no trifling matter—under these new & strange circumstances.” She aimed to cull forty efficient nurses for the “two Hospitals—averaging 3,000 sick.” She wrote from her experience of the month before,

had we come out with twenty instead of forty, we should not only have been less hampered with difficulties, but the work itself would have been actually better & more efficiently done. About ten of us have done *the whole work*. The others have only run between our feet & hindered us & the difficulty of assigning to them something to do without superintendence has been enormous.²⁷

Given that female nurses had never before been used in the military, Menzies may well have thought that there were more than enough nurses at Scutari. Given, too, Nightingale’s own sparse experience—visits to hospitals, a few months at Kaiserswerth, where the training she herself said was “nil,” and a year’s superintendence at the Harley Street home for gentlewomen in distress—it is not surprising that she underestimated the task at hand.

Nightingale’s focus was also consistent with her Victorian sensibilities whereby the lady, by her wealth and social standing, represented the spir-

itual aspects of her society. She was expected to exert such an influence by her example that "lower class" individuals—domestics in her home, recipients of her charity, and the like—would aspire to the same behavior. Such principles were behind her concerns that, with additional women at Constantinople, "good order would become impossible." "Regularity could not be preserved," she wrote, "[if] the Sisters & Nurses were living from under our own eye," and "the preventing from doing mischief" would be a constant task.

Sprinkled liberally throughout this letter were her threats to resign. Certainly the resignation of the socially and politically powerful Nightingale would threaten Herbert's own position. With each new list of dead and wounded published in the *Times* and with each new column about the bungled war, Herbert had to fend off new complaints. Nightingale's parting shot to the secretary at war was on the "grand administrative evil" in England: "Departments, each with its centrifugal & independent action, [are] uncounteracted by any centripetal attraction viz. a central authority capable of supervising & compelling combined effort for each object at each particular time." She was dead right. The history of nursing in the Crimean War reveals, however, that Nightingale never achieved central authority over nurses. Nightingale ruled from her position at the peak of the pyramid of power, and cared little for the ideas of people at the base of that pyramid. In this she was a woman of her class and time. She followed instead the example that existed in her own nation. She, like others, did not know that the Crimean War was the first crack in the crumbling of imperial Britain. With "the sick . . . laid up to our door," Nightingale rejected women who might have helped her cause.²⁸

The women anchored in the harbor had to look beyond Nightingale. The Sisters of Charity at Galata rescued the nuns, and the British embassy rescued the ladies and nurses in their party. Croke sighed a fervent "Deo Gratias" as she entered the convent of the Sisters of Charity that night. The following morning the weary nuns boarded a man-of-war for Constantinople. Delighted at "doing the honour," two naval officers took them from their ship to Constantinople (p. 7). The mosques and minarets had dazzled them from the distance of the anchored *Egyptus*; up close, however, the gilded domes and palaces could not hide the disorder and dirt. As the party "passed through a few rocky, dirty, crowded uncivilized looking, in fact, perfectly Turkish streets, [they were] gazed on by many a smoking Turk" (p. 8). The ladies and nurses proceeded to Therapia and the nuns to the convent at Galata.

Croke would not again be as idle as when she was waiting at Therapia.

More than the scenery would soon rivet her attention. Still, the nun from the small town in Ireland must have been dazzled by the capital of empires. Croke poetically described the Bosphorus, the Black Sea, and the “golden rays of the Eastern sun” lighting up mountains, majestic cedars, and cypress (p. 20). More prosaically this woman who had lived through the famine in Ireland was concerned with the “most scanty allowances” of food that the ambassador’s house supplied. “[We] would have been dreadfully low from [the] spare diet,” wrote Croke, “but [for] the invigorating air of Therapia” (p. 10).

On St. Stephen’s Day, 26 December 1855, Croke confided to her journal, “[I have] great fears of our being obliged to go back to our native homes and altars after having barely seen the outside of the hospital at Scutari. [I] feared that like Moses we might be only allowed a view of the land of promise” (p. 9). On 27 December the nuns left the convent of the Sisters of Charity where they had “slept on the [classroom] floor” and went to Therapia to Lord Napier’s “very pretty country seat with . . . the silvery Bosphorus [*sic*] running by its gate” (p. 9).

While Croke and her sisters waited and prayed, Bridgeman and Nightingale took measure of each other. Five days after she refused to receive the Sisters of Mercy, Nightingale welcomed them to Scutari in her letter of 22 December 1854.²⁹ After receiving the hand-delivered letter, Bridgeman traveled to Scutari to meet with Nightingale. “My question to you is, can you divide?,” Nightingale had asked in her letter, as she planned to make room for five of Bridgeman’s party by sending home the five nuns from Norwood, thus keeping the number of Catholics the same. Bridgeman was unable to give up her obligation “to see, sustain and direct [her sisters] as the novelty and difficulties of the position may require.”³⁰ Proposals offered by Bridgeman were rejected by Nightingale, as Nightingale’s were rejected by Bridgeman. One of the problems concerned their disparate ideas on nursing. According to Nightingale, only the wounded were in need of nursing care, and since most of the wounded were convalescent at that time, she felt there were sufficient numbers of nurses. But the hospitals were filled with soldiers with fever—cholera was then prevalent—and between fifty and ninety of them were dying daily. Said Bridgeman, “We had no appeal that these needed no nursing care as they were not wounded.”³¹ But more than nursing theory was involved in the struggle between the two women. Nightingale wrote to Herbert that she had given her “ultimatum to the new R.C. Superioress.” “We have not the slightest doubt that this woman not only intends to turn our house out of windows,” wrote Nightingale, “but to

trample upon & disperse the ruins, when out.”³² Bridgeman in turn concluded that she “had an ambitious woman to deal with on whom she could not rely.”³³ Adding to the tensions between the two women was the religious tumult that Nightingale called the Roman Catholic storm and the Protestant howl—Bridgeman’s allegiance to the ecclesiastical powers in Dublin, and the continuing uproar at home about nursing care for the army.

At Therapia, Croke recorded the following:

Spent the after supper recreation singing, storytelling, planning, conjecturing [and] prophesying away. Began a variety of Novenas joined by Miss [Mary] Stanley all to bring about the grand object of our ambition—the charge of an hospital. The Novenas not finished [6 January 1855] when . . . Rev Mother Clare from Scutari arrives to conduct thither five of our sisters. Mother Clare was supervisor of the Convent at Bermondsey and had been some time in Scutari serving under Miss Nightingale. Five sisters go to Scutari to serve under Mother M. Clare. Our Rev Mother one of the five. I mark this as a notable event. (P. 20)

At this time, the Barracks Hospital at Scutari held three thousand sick men. The General Hospital a half-mile distant held another one thousand men. The five nuns, each one of whom had far more nursing experience than did Florence Nightingale, were given non-nursing jobs. Sisters Agnes and Winifred were assigned to the kitchen under Mother M. Clare. Sisters Aloysius and Elizabeth sorted linen in the clothing store, and Mother Bridgeman, the most accomplished of all the nurses, was given nothing to do, at first; she later was given the job of ladling soup. Not one was allowed near the patients. A fresh outbreak of cholera that claimed the lives of doctors and caregivers as well as soldiers finally put these nurses with the patients.

Sidney Herbert validated Nightingale’s position. Herbert confessed in a letter to Bridgeman that he had acted under a misconception of Nightingale’s wants and wishes. He stated that Nightingale had full authority and there could be no appeal against her decisions. Then he expressed his regrets that his unwillingness to reject any offer of help had been the cause of Bridgeman’s fruitless journey. His postscript suggests, however, that Herbert knew that in times of war decisions made at home often have to be adapted to events happening at the seat of war: “P.S. I am informed here that your kind services may very possibly be required at Galata which if it relieves you from your present difficulties, I should be glad to hear had been the case.”³⁴

Croke wrote in her journal,

We are full of the hope of getting an hospital where we the fourteen Sisters under Mother M. Francis of Kinsale may work together. . . . The novenas have taken the Hospital by storm quite from under the wings of the Nightingale. [The hospital] had been occupied by the Russian prisoners, is about three miles from Scutari on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus [*sic*]. The name of the place is Koulali. Four sisters remain at Scutari.³⁵ Mother Francis joins the sisters for the Koulali work. [She] is to go regularly to see our Sisters in Scutari who are under her obedience. (Pp. 21–22)

Then she added,

Our dear Father [William] Ronan arrived. The Jesuit Father [was] appointed by the War Office to the exalted post of Chaplain to the Sisters of Mercy attached to the Army in the East. Also to the patients under their care . . . Already he has had many engagements for us with Miss Nightingale, [the] Commandant and [the] Protestant minister and so forth, and in all, he has acquitted himself with honour to himself and advantage to us. His natural character might seem pacific and cool but when called on he never wants fire, can take good aim, is firm, decisive and uncompromising. (Pp. 25–26)

After presenting his credentials to the episcopal and military powers, Ronan met with Nightingale. He outlined the terms under which the nuns would stay in Constantinople. Bridgeman would remain the superior, ten sisters would go to Koulali, and the other five would go to the general hospital at Scutari. The nuns would have the same accommodations as the nurses plus an oratory for their prayers; they would attend to the spiritual instruction of the Roman Catholics; they would care for all the sick; and they would not interfere with the religious concerns of Protestants. If these conditions were not met, the sisters would go home. “Miss Nightingale . . . agreed to [these terms] but refused to sign them,” wrote Ronan, and he added that “things then began to look better.” He concluded, “Miss Nightingale is easily dealt with.”³⁶

One and a half months after arriving in Constantinople, Croke went to work.

The 29th of January brought us to the Koulali Hospital. . . . Six stout Turkish boatmen, dressed in white tunics with braided vests and slippers [rowed the] pretty Turkish “caïque” [along the Bosphorus]. At the head of the boat sat an old weather beaten Turk with his flowing robes and turban . . . [the] Sisters of Mercy looking quite as grave and sombre as their veils and habits, . . . three or four of the Scutari nurses [and] the English guide from the Embassy. . . . Koulali is not considered so romantic a place as Scutari nor is it so full of interest to the traveller or veneration to the Turk. Scutari [is] a consecrated

spot because of [Mahamet and his horse] [p. 27]. . . . [But] no one can look on Constantinople surrounded as it is by so many commodious bays and harbours without thinking that nature had plainly intended it as the capital of a great empire [p. 30]. . . . [The Koulali General Hospital and the Koulali Lower Hospital] . . . are on the Bosphorus [*sic*] but a few minutes walk from each other. (P. 30)

The Koulali General Hospital and Koulali Lower Hospital were headed by Lady Stratford, the wife of British ambassador Stratford de Redcliffe. The Lady Stratford made “a very courteous visit” to greet the Sisters of Mercy (pp. 21–23).

Koulali: “We worked well there for our Heavenly Father”

Two hundred sick men from the Crimea arrived at the same time as the sisters. Five sisters were allocated to each hospital. Working with them were some secular ladies and paid nurses who had come out on their “mission of love” (p. 23). Mary Stanley, who had brought the nursing party to Constantinople, was in charge of the Koulali Lower Hospital. “Our Rev Mother has the superintendence [of the General Hospital] subject, I believe, in nursing details to Miss Nightingale” (p. 23). Croke was incorrect in giving Nightingale this status. By the time the nuns got to Koulali, the Aberdeen government had fallen, and Sidney Herbert, Nightingale’s main ally, was out of office. The secretary at war and secretary for war departments had been collapsed into one, and Lord Panmure was its new head. Panmure was quick to separate in authority the Scutari and Koulali hospitals, which were already separated by distance. Nightingale’s requests for a more substantial statement of her duties was met in 27 April 1855, when Panmure made her Almoner of the Free Gifts throughout the Crimea. Her orbit of power over nursing was confined to the Scutari Hospitals. Earlier that month Nightingale had resigned from Koulali—an unnecessary gesture, given that she did not have responsibility for it.

When the nuns arrived at Koulali they found the hospitals filthy and “in a state of the utmost disorder and the misery within almost complete” (p. 24). They had to get used to the new surroundings.

Our first night in the Koulali Hospital brought a laughable scene. A fire broke out in the capitol which was announced as usual [by a discharge of the cannon]. We did not know the custom and thought it would be nothing else

but the Russians who had come down [from the Crimea]. . . . Only when we saw the cool face of "Johnny" peeping out from his sentry box . . . could [we] sleep on the idea that the Russians were still before Sebastapol. (P. 30)

At a time when there was little that could be done for the sick, nursing consisted in caring for the body to cure the soul. Catholics and Protestants alike worked diligently to save the soul, but each sect guarded the sick person from intrusions by the other. Female nurses made their debut in the Crimean War; so too did Catholic chaplains ministering to the Catholic soldiers. Inevitably, the wards at Koulali repeated the religious wars raging in England and Ireland; in fact, it was decided at one point that wards and patients would be ordered along religious lines, with Catholic nurses assigned to Catholic wards and Protestant nurses assigned to Protestant wards. Most were happy with this proposal, except for the Protestant patients who claimed they would get no care. Still, Bridgeman kept the debate focused on nursing. The nuns were harassed throughout their time in the East. "[But] no one," said Bridgeman proudly, "ever charged us with neglecting the duty of nursing, all admitted to the contrary."³⁷

It is reasonable to assume that Bridgeman understood that racial biases heated up the religious dissension. But it is doubtful that Bridgeman knew of the correspondence between Herbert and Nightingale. "The real mistake we made in the selection of these ladies (between ourselves)," wrote Herbert to soothe Nightingale, "is that they are Irish. You cannot make their lax minds understand the weight of an obligation."³⁸ Later that year Nightingale summarized the matter:

It is the old story. Ever since the days of Queen Elizabeth the chafing against secular supremacy, especially English, on the part of the R[oman] Catholic Irish. . . . These Irish nuns are dead against us. . . . The proportion of R[oman] Catholics & of Irish has increased inconceivably in the army since the late Recruits. Had we more Nuns, it would be very desirable, to diminish disaffection. But *just not* the Irish ones.³⁹

The contract with the war office gave Bridgeman and Ronan the necessary power to prevail. The two provided a sharp contrast to Mother Clare Moore and Reverend Michael Cuffe. All were Irish-born and Catholic, but neither Moore nor Cuffe saw the new moment and its opportunities; they remained deferential to the English. In fact, Moore advised Bridgeman to do her work secretly and not ruffle the feathers of Nightingale. Moore allied herself with Nightingale and ignored her sisters from Ireland. She was "a perfect drudge," said a disappointed Bridgeman.⁴⁰ Cuffe, too, deferred to

those higher than himself on the pyramid of power. He even went so far as to ask the permission of the military officers to pray for a patient. He also deferred to Nightingale, who praised his submission in the following manner: Cuffe, "who used to call me 'Herod,'" said Nightingale, "now licks my hand, as the Provost Marshall says, 'like a good 'un.'"⁴¹

As these political, social, and religious dynamics played out, the mortality rates in the hospitals at Scutari and Koulali continued to climb. In February 1855, the secretary for war sent the Sanitary Commission to Constantinople. They began their work in March 1855 burying decayed carcasses of dogs and horses, whitewashing the walls, clearing drains, and cleaning the water supply. From that point on the mortality rates of the hospitals declined, but the work of the Sanitary Commission is seldom celebrated in histories of nursing at the Crimea.

"After having worked here in the hospitals of Koulali from February 1855 to October, same year, our work gradually became slack. . . . The Upper Hospital [Koulali General Hospital] in which were our quarters was finally made over to the allied Sardinian troops." Croke summarized her time at Koulali saying, "thousands of amusing and highly interesting things might be told here of our work at Koulali Hospital but from the press of work the writer of this journal cannot note them and must break off" (p. 32). Croke concluded, "Besides attending to the corporal wants of all the patients in the Hospital we prepared the dying of our own religion for the last Sacraments and instructed the sick" (p. 32).

Three items helped Bridgeman to keep her group of Sisters of Mercy intact and free from the blind obedience Florence Nightingale demanded.⁴² Bridgeman had a contract with the war office; she had the 12 January 1855 letter from Sidney Herbert directing her to find work; and she had Florence Nightingale's own words: "The sisters are assigned by Dr Meyer to the Inspector General not to me. . . . I have no power to dispose of those who do not come here—none are consigned to me. . . . If you should advise a Sister to withdraw at any time she can do so."⁴³ With the closing of Koulali, Bridgeman had to decide her next course of action. Of one thing she was certain: She would not work under Florence Nightingale.

Balaklava: "One mind appears to move all"

Bridgeman offered her services to Sir John Hall, the Principle Medical Officer in the Crimea.

He warmly took up the proposal of receiving herself and the Sisters to work in the Hospitals there having previously obtained them [and] from Miss Nightingale, a resignation of her authority over the Balaclava [*sic*] Hospital . . . Rev Mother was anxious to place her Sisters [there] independent of Miss Nightingale's authority. A week or so after the fall of Sebastapol, [the] order came from the Purveyor-in-chief, our *devoted* [friend] who happened to be just then in the Crimea desiring we should be ready at a moment's warning and a few days after, an official letter [came] from Sir John Hall to the PMO here desiring him to procure comfortable passes for "the sisters" up to Balaclava [*sic*] [and] finished the negotiations. There was also a note from Sir J. Hall to Rev Mother requiring her services as soon as possible. The whole thing was "nicely done" and no doubt we felt a wee bit important and comfortable in the fact that we were really *sought after* and that, too, at "Headquarters." (P. 33)

Croke and her sisters left "dear" Koulali on 7 October. "It was indeed endeared to us by many pleasing recollections. We worked well there for our Heavenly Master and, in spite of sectarian bigotry, worked happily" (p. 34). "We went up the Bosphorus to Scutari accompanied by Rev Father [J. Sydney] Woollett [Ronan's successor] who had come expressly from the Crimea to 'fetch us'" (p. 34). At Scutari they collected the nuns who had been working in the General Hospital. On the advice of Henry K. Storks, commandant general of the British forces in the Bosphorus, Nightingale went to the Crimea on the same boat, presenting a "semblance" of her authority.⁴⁴ "We were handed out of our caiques up the little ladder of the *Ottawa* and in a few minutes the little band of Sisters of Mercy 13 'strong' were once more on board" (p. 34). As they sailed by Therapia on 8 October 1855, they waved to Lady Stratford, who was waving to them from her window at the ambassador's house.

"It must be observed," wrote Croke, "that Miss Nightingale had a singular objection to our going to the Crimea and strained every nerve to prevent our passage. She sang plaintive notes in the ears of the Commandant General Storks on the subject of our going to Balaclava [*sic*] to have an hospital independent of her—even though it was the very one the charge of which she resigned" (p. 35). In fact, Nightingale had no jurisdiction over the nurses in the Russian Crimea. She had jurisdiction over nursing in Turkey, and even that authority had shrunk to Scutari hospitals, thanks to Panmure. As Nightingale had done at Koulali, she again resigned her "position" at Balaklava.⁴⁵ Croke wrote of Bridgeman's continuing resolution: "Reverend Mother was [determined] not to recognize [Florence Nightingale's] authority" (p. 38). "It was well known [that we] were no Nightingales but who were, notwithstanding, treated by Sir John Hall and

his medical staff as if we were something far more—even birds of Paradise” (p. 35).

On the *Ottawa* heading for the Crimea, “Miss Nightingale appeared as sweet and amiable on board as if she was charmed by the idea of ‘the sisters’ going to Balaclava [*sic*],” wrote Croke (p. 36). The passage was rough. “Our poor Rev Mother was dreadfully ill all the way and could not venture to table. Miss Nightingale remained in her berth during the entire sail. She is evidently struck down at the step we are taking and the more so as she knows Rev Mother’s determination not to recognize her authority. . . . Most of us very sick going up the Black Sea and all of us sickish” (pp. 37–38).

Bridgeman and Nightingale both risked their lives as separately they transferred from the *Ottawa* to the boat that would take them to land. Each intended to establish her authority on the Crimean peninsula. The next day, the rolling seas had calmed a bit and the rest of the party came ashore. When Croke and her sisters arrived, Bridgeman had dinner waiting for them, served picnic style on the floor of the sparsely furnished hut. Croke’s first meal in Balaklava became a banquet because of “dear potatoes” (p. 44).

Political turbulence followed the natural storminess.

A great breeze was up against us at the camp. The idea of thirteen nuns being in one hospital is a more *stirring* thing than a Russian *bullet*! We eagerly asked if the breeze would blow in our favor, that is, blow us home. [Fr Woollett] had no doubt it would blow like the storms of Koulali. The breeze at the camp was fanned by the gentle Miss Nightingale who is evidently crestfallen since the “Sisters of Mercy” have escaped from her fangs. (P. 54)

On 28 October Croke wrote, “We just hear that Miss Nightingale wrote to the war office to complain of our having thrown off her authority. She thinks it a thing impossible that we *could* remain here independent of her” (p. 68).

The “little band of Sisters of Mercy” were seasoned military nurses by this time (p. 34). And for the first time since coming East, the sisters were nursing together. What is more they were working unassisted: No ladies or nurses accompanied them to Russia. They had withstood the accusations of proselytizing, and the antipopery prejudice at Balaklava was much less virulent. Confronting the opposition had made the group even more cohesive. Croke recorded, “We are everyday becoming more settled and more fixed. Opposition seems always to have that effect with us” (p. 87). In a remark that dealt at once with the political storms and the Russian weather,

Croke concluded, "We think neither we nor our huts shall lose ground. We are as steadfast a party as there is in the Crimea" (pp. 52–53).

The sisters transmuted negative remarks into flash points of unifying laughter. They changed the accusation of a Catholic chaplain that they had come to Balaklava to make "fine fellows of [them]selves" (p. 48) into an affirmation: "We are such 'fine fellows'" (p. 49). At first Croke was annoyed by the contents of a letter from James Scott Robertson, the purveyor-in-chief.

He says Miss Nightingale is much alarmed at the "enormous extravagances of the Sisters of Mercy at Balaklava [*sic*], for instance they consume twenty pounds of meat in the day." . . . To make the story more weighty six or seven pounds were added as thirteen pounds or so of meat is what we generally require. I dare say she would consider five barley loaves and two fishes quite enough for us. (P. 95)

But the nuns incorporated the accusations into their repertoire of affirmations, blending them with a positive evaluation of "their great gentleness of manners" (p. 96). "We certainly are the most gentle sisters in Balaklava [*sic*] though Sister Magdalene says, 'We are great slashers'" (p. 96). Croke copied into her journal the parts of Deputy Purveyor-in-Chief David Fitzgerald's confidential report related to the sisters. His inquiry countered the claims of Nightingale; Fitzgerald found that twelve sisters were 50 percent less costly than the seven nurses who had preceded them.

The sisters laughed together when a former patient from Koulali recognized Bridgeman's leadership and "with the greatest possible satisfaction said to her, 'I am delighted Ma'am that you are commander-in-chief up here.'" Croke writes, "We were greatly amused as we generally confer that dignity on the Rev Mother when we are bestowing military titles on each other" (p. 111). And again they laughed together when another referred to Bridgeman as "Lady Bridgeman." The leader of the little band "got a title by coming out to Crimea," claimed Croke (p. 78). They laughed together, too, when rain poured unimpeded through the roofs of their little huts. One of the more practical sisters opened her umbrella over herself and tried to sleep in that fashion (p. 83). Bridgeman asked Croke, who loved to rhyme, to make a parody of "I'm afloat" (p. 79), at once making the best of a terrible situation and acknowledging the talents of one of her group.

Father Woollett, "Our little Jesuit," (p. 66) was a master psychologist. He provided moments of hilarity that offered to the nuns respite from the sickness and death that were their constant fare. He also poked fun at himself. One time he arrived in

his Crimean winter costume . . . of a pair of immense boots nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ the size of himself . . . with a large scarf shawl . . . [a] waterproof cloak and hood, a wide awake hat with the leaf far out over his wide awake face, and a waterproof cap such as sailors wear with a long leaf hanging behind to finish his headdress. He had a black silk handkerchief tied across his head and knotted under his chin to keep the hat and cap on. He was a minute at the door before we could recognize [his] sprightly little visage. . . . We hailed him with shouts of laughter which he excited still more by standing in the middle of the floor for admiration. (Pp. 81–82)

And as they laughed sickness and death were absent for a moment from their minds and hearts.

“WE SHALL NEVER FORGET THIS DAY”

Bridgeman kept convent life alive by arranging spiritual retreats for each sister, especially when she feared that camp life was dampening the sisters’ spirits. Daily devotions of Mass, prayer, and meditation were punctuated with celebrations such as the anniversary of the founding of the Sisters of Mercy. The “12th of December [1855],” wrote Croke, “we shall never forget this day for its being the foundation of the Order and for our preservation from the depths of the Mediterranean on our way East. We had Thanksgiving Mass and communion to-day and Benediction” (pp. 91–92).

Christmas was another day for celebrating. Although the work continued as usual, Christmas at Balaklava was festive. A bottle of champagne arrived from an anonymous “loving friend” (p. 96). On the twenty-fourth Croke recorded, “Xmas eve here as well as at home. Great preparations in the Extra kitchen. All the patients are to have rice puddings. Several have joined half crowns to get plum pudding” (p. 96). On Christmas day Croke exulted, “Christmas Day! Four Masses. A very pious, pleasant, agreeable, happy day. . . . Every face looks bright today” (p. 99). The spiritual comforts, humorous relief, and growing recognition of their worth made the group even more cohesive. This was transmitted to the nursing care they provided.

The Scutari and Koulali hospitals were two days away from the battlefield. It is not surprising, then, that Croke was anxious in her new setting in Balaklava, “the seat of war” (p. 48):

We have as yet but little to do in the Hospital save the getting the wards into order [pp. 54–55]. . . . We . . . heard the almost increasing roar of the cannons. . . . The writer says she saw a flash from one but her story was not . . . credited [pp. 47–48]. . . . [The enemy] are within 10 miles march of us. Our hearts are such at the idea of a protracted roar. (P. 56)

She contrasted the weather with the work saying, "It is a cheering day but the prospect before us not at all so" (p. 41). Croke worried about breaking a leg on the steep hills of Balaklava or becoming the target of the Russian cannons. She reported, "Great firing last night between the Russians and the Sardinians. This is a frightful place" (p. 107), using the same word to describe Balaklava as her brother had used to describe the famine in Ireland. Whether it was a giving in to the terror, an attempt to master it, or a preparation for the possibility, she joined with her sisters in claiming, "[We are] amazing ourselves by going in idea to Siberia as prisoners of war" (p. 105). Bridgeman kept the sisters focused and perhaps distracted them from their anxious thoughts. Croke recorded, "the extras very few and Rev Mother desires us to make pretty specialties when we can do nothing else. We have a number of them ready made only that they are second hand since the days of Koulali. Yet they are swallowed with avidity and prove most soothing to the poor patient" (p. 53).

TAKING OVER THE "SPIRITUAL CONSOLATION"

Bridgeman and her sisters had sole charge of nursing at Balaklava from October 1855 to 25 March 1856. The hospital at Balaklava consisted of a single stone building, around which were scattered fourteen wooden huts. Each sister had "two wards at least," says Croke. "The writer has two with fourteen patients in each. Two orderlies [are assigned] to each ward" (pp. 45–46). "The 14th of October 1855," wrote Croke, "First day in the Crimean Hospitals. The work not so heavy as that we had at one time in Scutari nor have we strength to do the same work now" (p. 45). The day before they had spent arranging their rooms, unpacking, and getting acquainted with their wards. As part of her first day in Balaklava, on 13 October 1855, Croke made "general and particular observations on a number of enormous rats, how they seem at home in every corner and have an air of indifference about them never before observed by us in cringing animals like them. The idea of being associated with them is something frightful. We go to work tomorrow. May our Lord assist us" (pp. 44–45).

One of the first things the sisters did was to relieve "overwilling orderlies of the long-enjoyed privileges of giving out the wine and brandy" (p. 46). This reduced the drinking among the staff and ensured that those most in need of its numbing effects would receive the alcohol. The orderlies, however, were "not at all pleased at the prospect of being soon deprived of their happiness of giving 'spiritual consolation' to their patients" (p. 46). This is not to say that the orderlies then became teetotalers. Several times

during the Crimean experience Bridgeman would be wakened in the middle of the night and urgently asked to break up a drunken brawl among the orderlies. She declined the honor.

Order was quickly introduced into the Balaklava Hospital. Croke went to her wards at 9:00 A.M. and reported that she "saw the orderlies hard at work making things look bright for us" (p. 48). Croke explained that orderlies were men who had "joined the army for ten years. They are no more wanted in the wards than a steam carriage which as you may suppose would be very much in the way" (p. 91). By 16 October Croke reported that "the faces of the orderlies are beginning to look bright as well as their tins" (p. 52).

The nuns also worked very hard. There were few curative remedies available at the middle of the nineteenth century. Nursing consisted of providing cleanliness, comfort, and nourishment. The Sisters of Mercy give no indication in the extant documents that, as they cleaned the patients of infestations of vermin, they were dealing with the carrier of the fever: "The prevailing fever," wrote Croke's colleague, "is a low typhoid, produced by overfatigue"; and again, "the poor patients have a kind of low fever, and no wonder; after the awful hardships they went through, their constitutions have been undermined and they are bad subjects for any disease."⁴⁶ Bridgeman's stuping techniques—hot, wet flannel sprinkled with chloroform and applied to the abdomen—were focused on symptomatic relief of the spasms of cholera sufferers rather than on any consideration of cure.⁴⁷

Patients received basic food. All other provisions—wine, milk, butter, eggs, jelly, and pudding—were called "extras." Croke records, "Extras very few and if these few are not got with ease, it is taken as a matter of course to do without them, deeming it quite enough that *they were ordered by the Doctor*. A good natured orderly told the writer 'not to trouble herself looking after [them] for that man' because as he wisely remonstrated 'anyone with reason could know that when a thing was not there, it could not be got.'" Croke cut through the red tape and the passivity of men who long ago had relinquished their judgment to the hierarchy. She reported, "However, the thing *was* there and got, too" (p. 46).

These extra nourishments were given out at specific times during the day. In the midst of jotting in her journal, Croke was summoned by a bell "to the extra kitchen to look after the dinners for our poor patients" (p. 51). She confided to her journal that "the patients begin to feel and to say they are getting comforts they never got before. Indeed up to this they got little they did not get before, only that kind words have been added" (p. 53).

Croke recorded the reaction of one of the medical officers to the nursing care given by the nuns. "A Doctor just said to me 'Sister, you must not listen to the patients when they ask you for anything. It will be impossible to get them out of the Hospital, they will be so petted.' 'Oh Doctor,' I said, 'Sisters of Mercy always listen to their patients'" (p. 73). Female nursing softened the harsh care once given by military orderlies.

Bridgeman's organization supported Croke's care of her patients. Bridgeman wrote to Purveyor-in-Chief Robertson, complaining of the extraordinary way things were there. "It is most amusing," wrote Croke, "there are plenty of things in the store. Yet no one thing can be gotten without down right *fighting* with the local Purveyor, the doctors, Sergeants, Storekeepers, in fact, with every official almost. The key of the store . . . is so rusty from want of use." "However," said Croke, using military language, "it must be acknowledged by all parties that Rev Mother makes a gallant stand and is really gaining the victory" (p. 74).

The Sisters of Mercy's system of nursing was well received. "Things are every day more in our favor," said Croke. "We are giving great satisfaction to the officials here" (p. 96). Sir John Hall, for example, stated, "The sisters are particularly calculated for the nursing on account of their great gentleness of manner" (p. 96). Deputy Purveyor-in-Chief David Fitzgerald's report on nursing at the Crimea in 1855 acclaimed,

The superiority of an extended system [of nursing] is beautifully illustrated in the Sisters of Mercy—one mind appears to move all—at once their intelligence, delicacy and conscientiousness invest them with a halo of confidence extreme. The M.O. can safely consign his most critical cases into her hands, stimulants or opiates ordered every five minutes will be faithfully administered—though the five minutes labor were repeated uninterruptedly for a week.—The number of sisters without being large is sufficient to secure for every patient needing it his share of attendance. A calm resigned countenance sits on the features of all and the soft care of the female and the lady breathes throughout. (P. 98)

"OUR FIRST DEATH"

An epidemic of cholera broke out soon after the sisters arrived. Mustard plasters were used to reduce the patients' painful abdominal spasms. Once cholera abated, typhus followed with the fever becoming very prevalent. Medical problems—cholera, typhus, scurvy, and infection—accounted for most of the mortalities in all the hospitals and at all times of the war. These were the same diseases the nuns knew from the famine years in Ireland

the decade before. Frostbite was more than a nipping of the toes and fingers. Exposure of wounded soldiers to the Russian winter made it a terrible and painful problem. The sisters cared for men with wounds and trauma. There were also civilians in the hospitals. One of Croke's patients was a "poor blown up man" (p. 68) who was injured while blasting the hills. Another, wrote the compassionate Croke, was a "dear little boy . . . that had his leg amputated. It is painful to witness his agony" (pp. 104–5). Croke empathized with a poor Russian woman whose face was "all scarred and cut from the Turks" (pp. 56–57). Croke heard the cries of a man being flogged. Fearful for her own patient who was marked "prisoner," Croke interceded for him: "I asked. I hardly thought my appeals would be kindly answered" (p. 114). Croke responded to the human need, her own as much as the patient's, and stopped, at least in this instance, a cruel practice.

Croke recorded on 19 October, "The cholera beginning to make its appearance. We have had for the last three days several cases of it. All fatal. . . . Sister Winifred complains of something like it." The next day Sister Winifred was worse. "The doctor pronounces it cholera" (p. 57). Croke and Sister Clare Keane of Kinsale were assigned to the English woman. From that close vantage point, Croke records cholera's swift march to death. "In less than half an hour after comes a death-like change, her utterances indistinct, her face and hands quite black and her mind wandering" (p. 58). Bridgeman never left the dying nun; she wrote, "[I] nursed her myself and see that all possible aid, spiritual and corporal, was lavished on her."⁴⁸ Little could be done. And as sisters, chaplains, and Florence Nightingale, who knew Winifred from Scutari, prayed the "De Profundis," the nun died.

Our first death! We are quite sad. . . . Our dear Sister was conveyed to her last resting place about four o'clock P.M. The coffin was borne by four soldiers who had previously begged the favour. . . . Three priests preceded the coffin reciting the "Miserere." Father Woollett carried the cross and Father Moloney the incense and thurible—we follow immediately after the coffin according to custom. Miss Nightingale who had asked Reverend Mother permission to attend followed. Immediately after us a motley crowd of sailors and soldiers officers and the Hospital officials. . . . The litany for a happy death was read just as the dear remains were lored [sic] into the grave. We never thought a Sister funeral in Turkey or Russia would have been so *imposing*. Still we turned towards our little hut sad enough wondering which of us would be next and begging Almighty God to require no other victim. We all retired about seven o'clock quite worn out. (Pp. 59–61)

Croke did not trust Florence Nightingale, nor her motive in offering to erect a white marble cross over the grave of Sister Winifred. Nightingale, wrote Croke, "wishes [to] let it appear she has control over us in life and death. Rev Mother does not wish it" (p. 69). One night Croke found herself caught between the two determined women.

I had the ill luck to meet Miss Nightingale this evening when making my night visit to the ward and had to undergo a regular cross examination as to what Rev Mother said when she got her message about the cross [for Sister Winifred's grave]. I had to use all manner of equivocation so as not to commit myself either with her or Rev Mother. . . . Miss Nightingale is sweet, amiable, gentle [and] most insinuating whenever she is doing merely the lady or even the friend. But when she wants to dominate, she has a way of putting completely aside all her womanish qualities. (Pp. 69–70)

"I HAVE CRIMEAN FEVER. I HOPE I SHALL NOT DIE HERE"

On 17 October 1855 Croke recorded, "Oh such a night! rats dancing about the room screeing [sic] under the boards. We fancied they were in our beds. It is fearful to think of them" (pp. 53–54). On the nineteenth Croke wrote, "We find ourselves growing familiar with our household quadrupeds, the rats. Did not mind their steeplechases so much last night" (p. 57). A week later on the twenty-sixth she wrote, "Awaked last night by a rat in the bed. The idea is frightful to think of" (p. 67). A few nights later she wrote, "two rats in bed last night—or one rat twice (All the same)" (p. 70). On 2 November Croke is clearly exasperated.

Of all the nights ever passed by poor "Sisters of Mercy" at home or abroad we passed last night from rats dancing and capering about the room upon the shelves, in the beds, occasionally taking cold baths in pans of water and dragging pieces of paper up and down the room. Rev Mother sat up in the bed in perfect despair. The Sisters in the next bed indulged in hearty yet subdued fits of laughter occasionally shaking off an unpleasant intruder. (P. 75)

Fatigue rescued Croke on 4 November: "Slept so well last night as to be unmindful of the uproar usually made by our nocturnal visitors" (p. 72).

On 6 November Croke reported, "Very sick last night sicker this morning" (p. 73). Still she went off to her wards. The next day she writes, "A very sick night. Not allowed up. I have Crimean fever. I hope I shall not die here. Dr sent for. Looks wisely at me—says something and goes away" (p. 75). Famine fever and Crimean fever were both typhus, a rickettsial infection borne from rat to rat by the louse, and from rat feces or the bite of

an infected louse to humans. The nocturnal visitors that Croke so abhorred as she made herself at home in Balaklava on 13 October 1855 were more than likely the culprits that caused her illness of 6 November 1855. During the incubation period of six to fourteen days, she probably carried the disease to her patients, just as cadaverous famine victims had spread the same disease throughout Ireland and onto what became known as coffin ships. The week before, on the eve of Celtic New Year/Halloween, 31 October 1855, Croke wrote,

I had the great happiness of seeing a sweet little babby [*sic*] today. The sight of it was refreshment to my eyes. I wished my sisters to share my happiness and so got the loan of the little rarity for awhile. (P. 71)

Like an acolyte to life, Croke carried the baby to her sisters. Did she also carry typhus to the baby?

Croke recovered. "Am better after 10 days; this is the 17th. Have begun to sit up. Never felt half so weak. Am getting great pettings. 18th up to Mass (Sunday)" (p. 75). "[On] the 19th," Croke reported, "[Am] growing in strength from diet of jelly and short cakes, eggs, arrowroot, mutton chops, chicken, chicken broth ec, ec" (p. 75). Gradually, Croke regained her health and continued her journal writing. On 26 November she enthused, "Quite delighted. Today am allowed to go to my ward the first time since I was sick" (p. 79). On 3 December she writes, "got permission, if I promise a nap . . . [to] be let go to my wards for half the day this week" (p. 79).

Rats seemed more nuisance than danger to the unsuspecting nuns. No one made any connection between the rats and Crimean Fever. On 23 November, while still convalescing, Croke wrote, "Nothing strange. An army of rats sucked a hundred eggs last night and killed a considerable number of chickens" (p. 77). Finally, the sisters got relief. "We are happy to note," wrote Croke on 5 December,

that the army of rats have lately vacated our huts. Where the long-tailed pests have gone is a subject of inquiry. We have been lately provided with a powerful champion in the person of a well bred Russian cat. It was purchased for us by Fr Woollett. . . . It is particularly handsome—and for a Russian—amazingly civilized on the whole. The manners of the creature are such as would lead you to suppose it had seen more peaceable and happier days. It is now a captive in the land of its fathers being constantly kept tied to a chair. (Pp. 88–89)

On 4 November, just before she herself became ill, Croke wrote, "Miss Nightingale is ill" (p. 72). The next day she reported, "Miss Nightingale not

well yet. She is sick of us and she can't digest us. Nor can she understand why the Medical staff do not combine at once to get her over the attack. If they only succeed in removing the Sisters of Mercy, she is all right again. But the only thing they seem anxious to prescribe is a change of air" (p. 73). Croke's natural compassion was noticeably absent when she mentioned Nightingale. Perhaps Croke was feverish and testy. By this time, though, Florence Nightingale had overdrawn on her account of Croke's good feelings.

Croke was still convalescing on 18 November when she wrote,

We have just heard from good authority that our friend Miss Nightingale wrote to Dr Hall to say that she was under the impression that the Sisters attention in the nursing was solely confined to Catholics. We have just heard from Rev Mr Woollett that to the great astonishment of the Principal Officer the gentle lady has been interfering in the canteens. She asked one of the medical gentlemen in charge of one of the Hospitals at the "front" if he would allow her to send him nurses. He sternly replied, "Madam I want none of your women. We know why they came out. It was to change their names and go home. And we know why the nuns came out." Miss Nightingale asked, "Did he think it was to win a name she came out?" He sweetly replied, "He was not going to question her intention but he would have none of her women." (Pp. 75-76)

"The 21st," wrote Croke, "We hear Miss Nightingale has just stepped on board the *Indus* for Scutari. We have been saying a Novena for that intention" (pp. 76-77). But the sisters were not yet rid of Nightingale. On 2 December Croke wrote,

Things as usual until post hour which brought a letter from the War Office. It was enclosed by Miss Nightingale and was an answer to hers telling of our coming out here and establishing ourselves independent of her. . . . The letter was quite a diplomatic business. It flattered Miss Nightingale's vanity by saying the Sisters should have consulted her at least those who were in Scutari. At the same [time] it imposed no penalty in consequence, nor in the least hinted at a recall, which Miss Nightingale so much desired. (Pp. 83-84)

THE UP SISTERS: NIGHT DUTY IN THE CRIMEA

The system of nursing that the Sisters of Mercy introduced was different from that practiced by their contemporaries at Scutari and their predecessors at Balaklava. Two tasks separated nursing from domestic work—one was giving out opiates and stimulants; the other was caring for patients throughout the night. Nightingale had lost the task of dispensing medication when the medical corps arrived, and she would not allow nurses on the

wards after 8:30 P.M.⁴⁹ The "Sisters," reported Croke, "were up in turn every night" (p. 57). "We have to go down a very steep hill to the wards. We go down at 9 o'clock. We find the orderlies 'pretty well' and not at all in *low spirits*. . . . We go up and down the wards every half hour with our little lamps. The patients are in different huts" (p. 62). The "up sisters" then slept the next day until four o'clock in the afternoon.

On 6 December 1855 Croke wrote, "We were much amused this evening by an article that appeared in the *Illustrated London News*" (pp. 89–90). The author mistakenly counted them as sixteen nuns. Worse, he said the

Irish ladies who having received instructions from Miss Nightingale appear to be very attentive to their charges and eminently deserving the name of Sisters of Mercy. They are attired from head to foot in the deepest black even their heads are carefully hooded. The only relief to this sombre attire is the double strand of beads hanging from their girdle. I was quite startled on my first introduction to one of these ladies. I had not even heard of their arrival and having a patient in a very critical state in one of the Hospital huts, I went down about midnight to pay him a visit. On opening the door I beheld by the light of a wretched little lamp just such a phantom . . . darkness in every corner of the room and a tall figure draped and hooded darker even than the night gliding from bed to bed. (P. 90)

Given their experience with Nightingale, little wonder they were amused.

A few nights later, Croke was one of the "up sisters." "Sat up last night. [I] had a very pleasant night up and down from hut to hut. My companion [was] Sister Aloysius of Carlow. Our 'wretched little lamps' went out. I missed a step and sat down in the mud. A very soft seat there being plenty of it" (p. 91). If Croke was serious about being a Sister of Mercy, she had a light and lively sense of humor about herself and human foibles. She laughed easily, especially when she fell into the tenacious mud of Balaklava. She laughed at having to wear army boots, wittily stating that she was "getting a regular footing in the service" (p. 106).

Sometimes the weather was "so cuttingly cold," Croke wrote, "that you would fancy it was freezing daggers" (p. 109). One of the coldest days in the Crimea, 19 December 1855, was followed two days later by a "lovely, fine day—soft, soothing and sunny" (p. 95). Other times rain soaked them even as they tried to sleep. They sloshed through the famous Crimean mud as they made their rounds of the huts.

We have as much mud about us this moment as would build a cabin for one of our poor country men. Of course this assertion will be recognized as an

Oriental tale—but speaking candidly of the Russian mud we never saw such a thing as it is. It sticks to one without “rhyme or reason” in a most *unbecoming* manner. When we fain would pass it over, it takes fast hold of the tails of our habits or petticoats and then holds on till it attracts general observation. If we go to our wards with a bright pair of leather boots, before we come up we are forced to exchange them for a pair of mud ones and we can only disengage ourselves from the unpleasant attachment by force of arms. (P. 108)

The 18th [December] Sister Stan[islaus] of Carlow and I up last night with a cholera patient and a poor dying Maltese. The night piercingly cold, a biting wind and a heavy frost. Yet we both count this the most pleasant night we had since we left home. We laughed nearly the whole night at one thing or another except while speaking to the poor patients and even then we had to do violence to ourselves on account of the foolish answers and unsteady movements of an orderly who had “a drop.” (Pp. 93–94)

Croke recounted only a few incidents of the religious wars in the hospitals. Soon after her taking charge of her wards, she recorded, “The writer and the Protestant chaplain in her ward for the first time. He seemed fair enough. We had polite conversation on the subject of writing letters for the patients” (p. 48). On 14 December Croke reveals, “I got into a little scrape with [the] protestant minister by giving one of Canon [Schmid’s] tales to one of his flock. However we soon came to terms. We like this minister very much. He is straight forward and acts on principle” (p. 92). Another instance was humorous rather than rancorous. One night, as she returned to her ward after making rounds, Croke says, “We find a *pious* orderly reading at the very top of his voice a chapter in the Bible for the good of the would-be sleeping patients. It was about the middle of the night. The unfortunate fellow did not know how to read and his attempt at pronouncing Nazareth was really laughable. However, we begged he would do us the pleasure of closing his mouth, if not his book” (pp. 62–63).

The nuns managed to keep up their spirits during their final months in the East. There were health problems, to be sure: Sister Elizabeth of Baggot Street had a brief fever. Clare Keane was sick while at Scutari. Sister Bernard had returned home because of illness. And Mother Bridgeman’s assistant, Sister Joseph of Kinsale, suffered “a dreadfully sore finger after last night,” reported Croke who pinpointed its probable cause. “Probably from applying dressing to the poor little boy’s leg” (p. 109). That Croke, the Dublin Elizabeth, and the Kinsale nun recovered was probably due to their strong health and the resistances built up gradually as they nursed the poor in Ireland. The sisters from England were less fortunate. Winifred

died of cholera. On 18 February, Sister Elizabeth Butler from Liverpool was very ill with the fever. Croke was up on the nineteenth with the ailing woman for whom she wrote, "We have very little hope" (p. 116). Sister Elizabeth was the oldest of the little band, somewhere between fifty and sixty years. Typhus was especially fatal to this age group because of its effects on the heart. Sister Elizabeth died on 23 February, as a tremendous Russian storm raged. "We almost thought the hut would be put afloat on the Black Sea. . . . The prayers for the dying had frequently to be interrupted, to let the frightful blast pass over" (p. 117). On 24 February, priests and sisters lined up behind the coffin of their English sister and processed between "double files" of bare-headed soldiers to the grave where only four months before they had buried Sister Winifred (p. 118). What Croke thought and felt after the funeral, she kept to herself. Her journal became silent for one full month.

Nurses of the 1990s can only wish that Croke had recorded more of her reflections, but only a few glimpses are allowed into her heart and mind. Life amid death surprised Croke; on 1 February 1856 she writes, "I saw a live woman today" (p. 113)—the first they had seen since they came to Balaklava. And once again Croke points out the marvel of life to her sisters on a day special to Brigit, the Celtic goddess of healing. On another occasion, as she spotted a "pretty little" butterfly during one of her walks on the hills of Balaklava, she was reminded of the senselessness of the slaughter at this "miserable fishing village" (p. 55). Philosophical musings are, however, few in this journal. More than likely, introspection was expressed in her spiritual rituals and a private interior life. Croke remained throughout the journal a woman who deals with life as it presented itself each day at camp and in cloister.

"The war is just over! Deo Gratias"

At Christmas 1855, the Sisters' third away from home, all sorts of rumors of peace ran around the camp. "Oh! the noise of peace is like heavenly music in my ears," wrote Croke (p. 101). On 21 January Croke recorded, "Great talk of peace, . . . in the hope of not only going home but of bringing with us the olive branch" (p. 110). The continuing hostilities, however, squelched those rumors. On 25 January Croke expressed her disappointment. "Down-spirited today. All the peaceable reports contradicted" (p. 111). But Bridgeman decided that the war was over as far as the Sisters of Mercy were

concerned. Croke captured the elation at the news. "Rev Mother says we shall not follow the camp any further. We are delighted! Charmed at the news! Got recreation in consequence for fear we might take it to *express* our delight" (p. 107).

Now the rumors of peace and the plans for departure went hand in hand. Another month passed. Croke writes, "Peace almost certain, they say" (p. 114), and three days later, "we are in high glee. Reverend Mother thinks we may be on our way home about the 25th of March. A soldier asked her today were we not tired of knocking about here" (p. 115). The war and the mission were drawing to a close. All that was left was the definitive statement.

Finally, an armistice was proclaimed on 29 February 1856, and on 30 March the Treaty of Paris was signed. "The war is just over! Deo Gratias!" wrote Croke, "Peace to be proclaimed in a few days. The troops to be recalled, the patients sent home and the hospitals closed" (p. 121). As the war ended, the government gave Florence Nightingale what she had wanted since October 1854. She was declared, on 16 March 1856, to be the general superintendent of the female nursing establishment of the military hospitals of the army. By this time the hospitals at Balaklava were almost empty. The bulk of the patients were at Scutari waiting for ships to take them home. But, wrote Croke, "Miss Nightingale . . . came [25 March] to Balaklava [*sic*] with some sisters from Scutari to have charge of the Land Transport Corps" (p. 121).

Florence Nightingale came frequently to entreat the "Mother Bridgeman" that she and the sisters would remain at Balaklava [*sic*], promising she would not at *present* exercise the authority of her "*now definite position*." Rev Mother would not recognize her for an hour. She told her she would immediately resign her charge to Dr. Hall from whom she had received [it], that *he* was the *head* she engaged under and [she] would continue her work subject to no other. Miss Nightingale urged that she would not interfere at least in "spirituals" that all she wanted just then was [that Bridgeman] simply to "acknowledge" her. Mother Francis was not so simple. . . . Another visit from Miss Nightingale entreating in her sweetest tones that Rev Mother and the Sisters would remain and prophesies if not, she would repent the day. Rev Mother though full at heart could not prevent a smile. (Pp. 129–33)

Bridgeman resigned on 25 March 1856. Before she said her final good-bye to Nightingale, Bridgeman discussed her nursing methods. "Miss N took notes of our manner of nursing, which Rev Mother explained to her as she hoped someone might profit of it."⁵⁰

The nuns nursed in the Crimean War without payment. When Abdul Medged, the sultan of Turkey, asked that all nurses share in his gift, Nightingale tried to block the bounty from entering the coffers of the sisters.

There was an interregnum at the General Hospital at Balaclava [*sic*] for some months during which Mrs Bridgeman superintended her Nuns at that Hospital. Lord Stratford may indeed remember their Establishment there during that period, since it was to him the Government at home expressed its disapprobation of the course pursued by Mrs Bridgeman on that occasion, in withdrawing Nuns from under my superintendence at Scutari. The question to be decided by Your Excellency will be whether Mrs Bridgeman is to be considered as having been a recognized Superintendent of Hospital Nursing at that time. During the rest of the war that Hospital was under my care.⁵¹

Panmure handled the matter, and on 26 December 1856 he gave each convent its share for the nurses they provided in the British hospitals in the Bosphorus and Crimea.⁵² As she had done throughout her time in the East, Nightingale cast the work of the Sisters of Mercy in the worst possible light. She would continue to do so long after the war was over. And when she was done, others would repeat the Nightingale version of nursing in the East.

“Packing up for the Emerald Isle, the fairest ’neath the sun”

On 11 April 1856, ten sisters and Bridgeman prepared for the journey home. Croke recorded, “Numbers [of military] coming down, from the camp even, to get one look more at ‘the Sisters.’ Great contests about who would carry our things. Applications from various favourites or those who think they are. I promised thrice to allow them to cord my trunk” (p. 137).

As she stepped aboard the *Cleopatra*, having foiled death, Croke’s elated “Going home alive!” (p. 138) is almost palpable. “Every heart beat light—Going home! After such scenes! And going home, *alive*! We looked at each other when we stepped on board and the look told much and each one read it correctly” (p. 138). “Our favourite, 89th [Royal Irish Fusiliers] down ‘on pass’ to see us off.” Nightingale also came on board, not to say good-bye but for the key to the storeroom. More important to Croke were the three orderlies who worked with and for the nuns. “They were breaking their hearts. God bless them! poor fellows. We owed them much of the little

personal comfort we had. . . . We left the curious harbour of Balaclava [*sic*] amid the blessings and prayers of all and the tears of many" (p. 139).

They sailed for two days across the Black Sea as first-class passengers and as honored dignitaries. They passed by Therapia, their former "country seat," and by Koulali, and then they anchored for two days amid the mosques and minarets of Constantinople. Then on the seventeenth they sailed into the Dardanelles, smoothly into the archipelago, by the house where Lord Byron had lived. Sixteen months before, Croke had been enchanted with the scenery. Now she only complained, "We are going home slowly for people going home—We may be twenty days yet before we get to London" (p. 144). On 19 April she grumbled, "going wretchedly slow" (p. 144).

In contrast to their journey East, they traveled now only by the sea route. The spring sea was just as tumultuous as the waters had been during their winter voyage. "We all expect to be sick," wrote Croke. She then comforted herself, "There is, however, no danger" (p. 144). She was an experienced sailor, but past sea voyages provided no immunity to seasickness. Croke recorded, "So sick yesterday, I could not write a word to say so. What a pity! The ship going from side to side. Tossing all its poor inmates about. We are all in the cabins lying on sofas or in our berths. The stewards bringing us basins, cups of tea and other sea sick things" (p. 144). As they approached Malta, the sea was tossing about, almost reaching the top edge of the deck. Not only were they frightened, they were "pretty miserable" (p. 145).

A brief stop over at Malta included a visit to the chapel devoted to the nursing order of the Crusades, the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. Once back on board the seasickness continued. "A most unpleasant night. The ship tossing about in a particularly sickening way. But we are going home! . . . The sensation caused by the perpetual rocking of the vessel is indescribable. Poor Rev Mother very ill and we are all ill-disposed" (pp. 150–51). Croke continued, "The waves mountains high. The want of air suffocating. The perpetual motion turning all inside out. We made the best resolutions we could to sleep. Still we were so wide awake to fright we could not close our eyes. Now and then a sister would say to another in the next berth 'Sister, are you asleep?' 'No!' was the reply. 'Are you?'" (p. 152).

The voyage became more peaceful as they passed the Spanish coast. All were safe. The pace quickened. No signs of storms were in the skies. "Our faces brighter," wrote Croke (p. 152). An old Irish bishop with a green ribbon around his hat came aboard the ship at Gibraltar. After a pleasant day he

gave the sisters “a fervent blessing and a genuine Irish shake hands” (p. 154). Turbulence met them again as they sailed into the Bay of Biscay, and though they were not exactly seasick they were “heartedly sick of the sea.” Croke marveled, “[what a] heavy swell threatening. It is delightfully frightful to watch the white waves bounding about with ample freedom” (p. 156).

On 7 May they sailed into the cold and dreary English Channel and finally arrived at Spithead and then, Portsmouth. They had survived the ocean voyage and were on *terra firma* once again, yet they were not quite home. From Portsmouth they took a train to London and to the convent at Blanford Square.

“Arrived!”

The episcopal hierarchy greeted and debriefed them. At Chelsea they parted with their “dear Mother” and in London with their “Jesuit Father.” Then, retracing the route she had taken sixteen months before, Croke headed for Liverpool and the Kingstown packet that would take her to Ireland. The next morning she wrote, “Dublin’s beauteous bay in tranquil splendour blessed our view” (p. 160). After a stop at Catherine McAuley’s Baggot Street, ironically enough built on land once owned by Sidney Herbert, Croke headed for the “cherished spot that nothing in the ‘wide earth’ could disenchant. Dear home” (p. 161).

County Cork blazed with bonfires and tar barrels to greet the “Russian” nuns. “All here in the [Charleville] Convent were in the greatest joy at the safe return of Sister Joseph.” For a long time thereafter, Croke’s “Eastern Campaign was . . . the subject of evening recreations.”⁵³ Croke was reunited with her sister Margaret, who was now Sister Ignatius, a Sister of Mercy at Charleville. Her brother Thomas was just a few miles away in Middleton. Thomas S. Croke, the uncle who had saved Croke and her family, lived to be ninety years old and died in Charleville on 22 February 1873. Croke herself spent the rest of her life in Charleville. From 1862 until her death from cancer on 7 November 1888—almost to the day thirty-three years after her bout with Crimean fever—Croke held administrative posts. She is remembered by her sisters favorably as a leader.⁵⁴

With the dissolution of their contract with the war office, the nuns reverted to a subject people.⁵⁵ The documents of the Irish Mercy Nuns were stashed away in the archives at Charleville, Kinsale, and Dublin, and those of Ronan and Woollett in Dublin and London. The story they told

remained silent, as the myth of Florence Nightingale obscured the reality of nursing during the Crimean War.

Conclusion

Freedom and necessity were the twin poles of Croke's experience as a Crimean War nurse. She volunteered for the mission of the Mercy Sisters and then deferred to the direction of its leader. Within this organized system she fulfilled her life as a nun and a nurse. She was both a serious and a light-hearted woman. She paid attention to the ordinary events of her day and the people who surrounded her. The absence of detail in her diary about nursing procedures is more than made up for by her accounts of the first patients of modern nursing. She reacted spontaneously to her experiences, whether to natural occurrences such as the sea, the cold, and the Russian mud or to her daily encounters with people. Croke's attachment to reality most marks this nun and nurse. At the same time that Croke fulfilled her commitment to a goal that transcended this world, she was compassionate for the people in it. She and her sisters used the contract they held from the war office to protect their autonomy. Their nursing, grounded in rights as opposed to privileges, helped the nuns to gain access to patients who needed their care. Many of these men suffered from the same diseases contracted by Ireland's famine victims. Though she lived in a male-dominated, male-directed society, Croke banded with her sisters in an island of female self-determination. Their response to social injustice was an essential part of the nineteenth-century's female-led humanitarian movement. More important, the work of Croke and her sisters forms the roots of modern nursing.

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22. C. B. Lyons to William Cullen, 27 November 1854, Cullen Papers, Archbishopal Archives, Dublin.

23. William Ronan to My Dear Rev Sir, 22 January 1855, Cullen Papers, Archbishopal Archives, Dublin.

24. Accounts of Florence Nightingale often give (erroneously) 15 December 1854 as the date on which the Irish Sisters of Mercy arrived at Constantinople. Diaries, contemporary accounts, and Croke's journal state 17 December 1854 as the date.

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28. *Ibid.*

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33. Bridgeman, *Account*, 9.

34. Sidney Herbert to Mother Francis Bridgeman, 12 January 1855, photostat at Archives Sisters of the Americas, Silver Springs, Md. Original in the Archives of Convent of Sisters of Mercy at Kinsale, Ireland.
35. Three of the original five sisters remained in Scutari: Elizabeth Hersey, Agnes Whitty, and Winfred Sprey. Sisters Paula Rice and Clare Keane replaced Bridgeman and Aloysius Doyle when they went with the rest of the nuns to Koulali.
36. William Ronan to My dear Rev Sir, Scutari Hospital, 22 January 1855, Cullen Papers, Archepiscopal Archives, Dublin.
37. Bridgeman, *Account*, 43.
38. Sidney Herbert to Florence Nightingale, 5 March 1855, cited in Lord Stanmore, *Memoir of Sidney Herbert, Lord of Lea* (London: John Murray, 1905), 1:412.
39. Florence Nightingale to Lizzie Herbert, 17 November 1855, sent 20 February 1856, in "I have done my duty," 178.
40. Bridgeman, *Account*, 21; Bolster, *Crimean War*, 107. See also F. B. Smith, *Florence Nightingale: Reputation and Power* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 36.
41. Florence Nightingale to Sidney Herbert, 3 April 1856, in Goldie, "I have done my duty," 247.
42. Goldie, "I have done my duty," 9.
43. Bridgeman, *Account*, 15–16.
44. Goldie, "I have done my duty," 159.
45. Florence Nightingale to Sir John Hall, 15 October 1855, in Goldie, "I have done my duty," 161.
46. *Leaves*, 2:173.
47. Doyle, *Memories*, 37–38.
48. *Leaves*, 192–93.
49. Anne Summers, *Angels and Citizens: British Military Nurses, 1854–1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988), 50–51.
50. Bridgeman, *Account*, 123.
51. Florence Nightingale to Stratford DeRedcliffe, 7 July 1856, Hawes Collection, Countway Library, Harvard University.
52. Lord Panmure to Sir, 26 December 1856, photostat in Archives Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Silver Spring, Md. Original in Convent Archives, Kinsale, Ireland.
53. *Annals*, Charleville, 12, 24.
54. Sister M. Albeus Russell, RSM, personal communication with author, August 1992, Charleville.
55. The Easter Monday 1916 uprising set off a series of events that culminated in 1938, in the Republic of Ireland.